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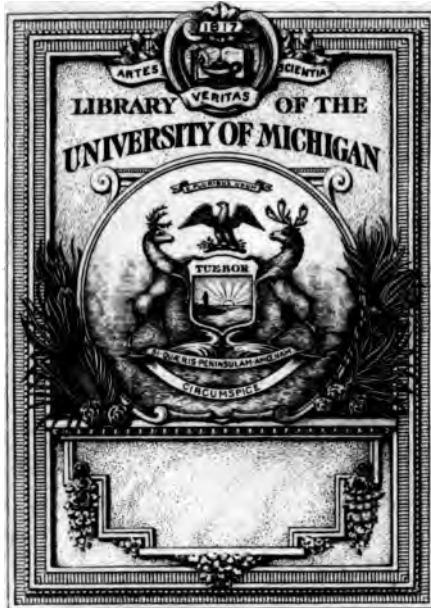
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a tree  
with a  
bird  
in  
it



Margaret  
Widdemer



THE GIFT OF  
Prof. Aubrey Tealdi

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**A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT**



# A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT:

A SYMPOSIUM OF CONTEMPORARY  
AMERICAN POETS ON BEING  
SHOWN A PEAR-TREE ON  
WHICH SAT A GRACKLE

BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER


AUTHOR OF "FACTORIES," "THE OLD ROAD TO PARADISE,"  
"CROSS CURRENTS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
WILLIAM SAPHIER




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**THIS IS DEDICATED  
WITH MY FORGIVENESS IN ADVANCE  
TO THE POETS PARODIED IN THIS BOOK  
AND THE POETS NOT PARODIED IN THIS BOOK**



1911  
J. H. Allen, Guelph, Canada  
19-1934  
and 1934

## FOREWORD

BY THE COLLATOR

A little while since, I had the fortune to live in a house, outside of whose windows there grew a pear-tree. On the branches of this tree lived a green bird of indeterminate nature. I do not know what his real name was, but the name, to quote our great exemplar Lewis Carroll, by which his name was *called* was the Grackle. He seemed perfectly willing to be addressed thus, and accordingly was.

Aside from watching the Pear-Tree and the Grackle, my other principal occupation that winter was watching the Poetry Society of America now and then at its monthly meetings. It occurred to me finally to invite such members of it as cared to come, following many good examples, to an outdoor symposium under the tree. The result follows.

MARGARET WIDDEMER.

P. S.—The tree died.



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# A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT



*Jessie B. Rittenhouse*

(She steps brightly forward with an air of  
soprano introduction.)

### RESIGNATION

I look from out my window,  
Beloved, and I see  
A bird upon a pear bough,  
But what is that to me?

Because the thought comes icy;  
That bird you never knew—  
It's not your bird or pear tree,  
And what is it to you?

*Edwin Markham*

(who, though he had to lay a cornerstone, unveil a bust of somebody, give two lectures and write encouraging introductions to the works of five young poets before catching the three-ten for Staten Island, offered his reaction in a benevolent and unhurried manner.)

#### THE BIRD WITH THE WOE

Poets to men a curious sight afford;  
Still they will sing, though all around are bored;  
But this wise grackle does a kinder thing;  
Silent he's bored, while all around him sing!





*Witter Bynner*

(Prefaced by a short baritone talk on Chinese  
architecture.)

THE UNITY OF ONENESS

Celia, have you been to China?  
There upon a mystic tree  
Sits a bird who murmurs Chinese  
Of the Me in Thee.

'Neath that tree of willow-pattern  
Twice seven thousand scornful go  
Paraphrasers and translators  
Of the long-deceased Li-Po:

Chinese feelings swift discerning  
Without all this time and fuss  
Let us eat that bird, thus learning  
Of the Him in Us!



*Amy Lowell*

(Fixing her glasses firmly on the rest of the  
Poetry Society in a way which makes them  
with difficulty refrain from writhing.)

### OISEAURIE

Glunk!

I toss my heels up to my head . . .  
That was a bird I heard say glunk  
As I walked statelily through my extensive, expen-  
sive English country estate  
In a pink brocade with silver buttons, a purple  
passementerie cut with panniers, a train,  
and faced with watered silk:

But it  
Is dead now!  
(The bird)  
Probably putrescent  
And green. . . .

I scrabble my toes . . .  
Glunk!

*Edgar Lee Masters*

(Making a statement which you may take or  
leave, but convincing you entirely.)

IMRI SWAZEY

I was a shock-headed boy bringing in the  
laundry;  
Why did I try for that damn bird, anyway?  
I suppose I had been in the habit of aiming for  
the pears.  
But I chucked a stone, anyhow,  
And it ricocheted and hit my head,  
And as it hadn't any brains inside the stone  
busted it  
And there I was, dead.  
And dead with me were all the improper things  
I'd got out of the servants about their employers  
Bringing in the laundry;  
But the grackle sings on.  
Sing forever, O grackle!  
I died, knowing lots of things *you* don't know!

*Edwin Arlington Robinson*

(He mutters wearily in an undertone.)

### RAMBUNCTO

Well, they're quite dead, Rambuncto; thoroughly  
dead.

It was a natural thing enough; my eyes  
Stared baffled down the forest-aisles, brown and  
green,

Not learning what the marks were. Still, who  
learns?

Not I, who stooped and picked the things that  
day,

Scarlet and gold and smooth, friend . . . smooth  
enough!

And she's in a vault now, old Jane Fotheringham,  
My mother-in-law; and my wife's seven aunts,  
And that cursed bird that used to sit and croak  
Upon their pear-tree—they threw scraps to  
him—

My wife, too. Lord, that was a curious thing!  
Because—"I don't like mushrooms much," I  
said,

And they ate all I picked. And then they died.  
But . . . Well, who knows it isn't better that  
way?

It's quieter, at least. . . . Rambuncto—friend—  
Why, you're not going? . . . Well—it's a stupid  
year,

And the world's very useless. . . . Sorry. . . .  
Still

The dusk intransience that I much prefer  
Leaves place for little hope and less regret.  
I don't suppose he'd care, to stay to dine  
Under the circumstances. . . . What's life for?

*Robert Frost*

(Rather nervously, retreating with haste in the  
wake of Mr. Robinson as soon as he had  
finished.)

### THE BIRD MISUNDERSTOOD

There was a grackle sat on our old pear tree—  
Don't ask me why—I never did really know;  
But he made my wife and me feel, for really  
the very first time  
We were out in the actual country, hindering  
things to grow;

It gave us rather a queer feeling to hear the  
grackle grackle,  
But when it got to be winter time he got up  
and went thence  
And now we shall never know, though we watch  
the tree till April,  
Whether his curious crying ever made song or  
sense.

*Carl Sandburg*

(Striking from time to time a few notes on  
a mouth-organ, with a wonderful effect of  
human brotherhood which does not quite  
include the East.)

### CHICAGO MEMORIES

Grackles, trees—

I been thinkin' 'bout 'em all: I been thinkin'  
they're all right:

Nothin' much—Gosh, nothin' much against God,  
even.

*God made little apples*, a hobo sang in Kankakee,  
Shattered apples, I picked you up under a tree,  
red wormy apples, I ate you. . . .

That lets God out.

There were three green birds on the tree, there  
were three wailing cats against a green  
dawn. . . .

'Gene Field sang, "The world is full of a number  
of things,"

'Gene Field said, "When they caught me I was  
living in a tree. . . ."

'Gene Field said everything in Chicago of the  
eighties.

Now he's dead, I say things, say 'em well,  
too. . . .

'Gene Field . . . back in the lost days, back  
in the eighties,

Singing, colyumning . . . 'Gene Field . . . for-  
gotten . . .

Back in Arkansaw there was a green bird, too,  
I can remember how he sang, back in the lost  
days, back in the eighties.

Uncle Yon Swenson under the tree chewing  
slowly, slowly. . . .

Memories, memories!

There are only trees now, no 'Gene, no eighties

Gray cats, I can feel your fur in my heart . . .

Green grackle, I remember now,

Back in the lost days, back in the eighties

The cat ate you.



SAPHIR.





*Edith M. Thomäs*

(She tells a friend in confidence, after she is  
safely out of it all.)

### FROST AND SANDBURG TONIGHT

Apple green bird on a wooden bough,  
And the brazen sound of a long, loud row,  
And "Child, take the train, but mind what you  
do—  
Frost, tonight, and Sandburg too!"

Then I sally forth, half wild, half cowed,  
Till I come to the surging, impervious crowd,  
The wine-filled, the temperance, the sober, the  
pied,  
The Poets that cover the countryside!

The Poets I never would meet till tonight!  
A gleam of their eyes in the fading light,  
And I took them all in—the enormous throng—  
And with one great bound I bolted along.

. . . . .  
If the garden had merely held birds and flowers!  
But I hear a voice—they have talked for hours—  
"Frost tonight—" if 'twere merely he!  
Half wild, half cowed, I flee, I flee!

*Charles Hanson Towne*

(Who rather begrudged the time he used up  
in going out to the suburbs.)

### THE UNQUIET SINGER

He had been singing, but I had not heard his  
voice;

He had been bothering the rest with song;  
But I, most comfortably far  
Within the city's stimulating jar  
Feeling for bus-conductors and for flats,  
And shop-girls buying too expensive hats,  
And silver-serviced dinners,  
And various kinds of pleasant urban sinners,  
And riding on the subway and the L,  
Had much beside his song to hear and tell.

But one day (it was Spring, when poets ride  
Afield to wild poetic festivals)  
I, innocently making calls  
Was snatched by a swift motor toward his tree  
(Alas, but lady poets will do this to thee  
If thou art decorative, witty or a Man)  
And heard him sing, and on the grass did  
bide.

**But my whole day was sadder for his words,  
And I was thinner  
Because, in spite of my most careful plan  
I missed a very pleasant little dinner . . .  
In short, unless well-cooked, I don't like Birds.**

*Sara Teasdale*

(Who got Miss Rittenhouse to read it for her.)

AT AUTUMN

I bend and watch the grackles billing,  
And fight with tears as I float by;  
O be a fowl for my heart's filling!  
O be a bird, yet never fly!

*Ezra Pound*

(Mailed disdainfully by him from anywhere  
but America, and read prayerfully by a  
committee from Chicago.)

RAINUV: A ROMANTIC BALLAD FROM  
THE EARLY BASQUE

. . . so then naturally  
This Count Rainuv I speak of  
(Certainly I did not expect you would ever have  
heard of him;  
You are American poets, aren't you?  
That's rather awful . . . I am the only Ameri-  
can poet  
I could ever tolerate . . . well, sniff and pass. . . .)  
Therefore . . . well, I knew Rainuv.  
(My P. G. course at Penn, you'll remember;  
A little Anglo-Saxon and Basuto,  
But Provençal, mostly. Most don't go in for  
that. . . .  
You haven't, of course . . . What, no Provençal?  
Well, of course, I know  
Rather more than you do. That's my specialty.  
But then—*Omnis Gallia est divisa*—but no mat-  
ter.

Not fit, perhaps you'd say, that, to be quoted  
Before ladies. . . . That's your rather amusing  
prudishness. . . .)

Well, this Rainuv, then,  
A person with a squint like a flash  
Of square fishes . . . being rather worse than  
most

Of the usual *literati*  
Said, being carried off by desire of boasting  
That he knew all the mid-Victorians

*Et ab lor bos amics:*

(He thought it was something to boast of.)

We'll say he said he smoked with Tennyson,  
And—deeper pit—*pax vobiscum*—went to vespers  
With Adelaide Anne Procter; helped Bob Brown-  
ing elope

With Elizabeth and her lapdog (said it bit him)  
Said he was the first man Blake told

All about the angels in a pear-tree at Peckham  
Rye

Blake drew them for him, he said; they were  
grackles, not angels—

(Blake's not a mid-Victorian, but you don't know  
better)

So . . . we come, being slightly irritated, to  
facing him down.

“ . . . And George Eliot?” we ask lightly.  
“*Roomed with him,*” nodded Rainuv confidently,  
“*At college!*” . . . Ah, *bos amic! bos amic!*  
Rainuv is a king to you. . . .  
Three centuries from now (you dead and messy)  
men whispering insolently  
(Eeni meeni mini mo . . .) will boast that their  
great-grand-uncles  
Were kicked by me in passing. . . .



*Margaret Widdemer*

(Clutching a non-existent portière with one hand.)

### THE SIGHING TREE

The folk of the wood called me—

“There sits a golden bird  
Upon your mother’s pear-tree—”  
But I never said a word.

The Sleepy People whispered—

“The bird is singing now.”  
But I felt not then like leaving bed  
Nor listening beneath the bough.

But the wronged world beat my portals—

“Come out or be sore oppressed!”  
So I threw a stone at the grackle  
And my throbbing heart had rest.





*Richard Le Gallienne*

(Advancing with a dreamy air of there still  
being a Yellow Book.)

### BALLADE OF SPRING CHICKENS

Spring comes—yet where the dream that glows?  
There only waves upon the lea  
A lonely pear-bough where doth doze  
A bird of green, and merely he:  
Why weave of him our poetry?  
Why of a Grackle need we sing?  
Ah, far another fowl for me—  
I seek Spring Chickens in the Spring.

Though May returns, and frisking shows  
Her ankles through this white clad tree,  
Alas, old Spring's gone with the rose,  
Gone is all old romance and glee—  
Yet still a joy remains to me—  
Softly our lyric lutes unstring,  
Far from this Grackle we shall flee  
And seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

Too soon Youth's *ms* must close,  
(*Omar*) its rose be pot-pourri:

What of this bird and all his woes!  
Catulla, I would fly to thee—  
Bright bird of luring lingerie,  
Of bushy bob, of knees aswing,  
This golden task be mine in fee,  
To seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

*Envoi*

Prince, let us leave this grove, pardie,  
A flapper is a fairer thing:  
Let us fare fast where such there be,  
And seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

*Angela Morgan*

(Carefully lifting her Greek robe off the wet  
grass, and patting her fillet with one white  
glove, recites passionately.)

OH! BIRD!

I heard a flaming noise that screamed—  
“Man, panting, crushed, must be redeemed!  
Man! All the crowd of him!  
Quiet or loud of him!  
Men! Raging souls of them!  
Heaps of them, shoals of them!  
Hurling impassioned through fiery-tongued rap-  
ture!  
Leaping for glories all avid to capture  
Bounteous æons of star-beating bliss!”  
I heard a voice cry, and I’m sure it said this:  
Though the cook said the noise was a tree and  
a bird . . .  
*But I heard! Gods, I heard!*

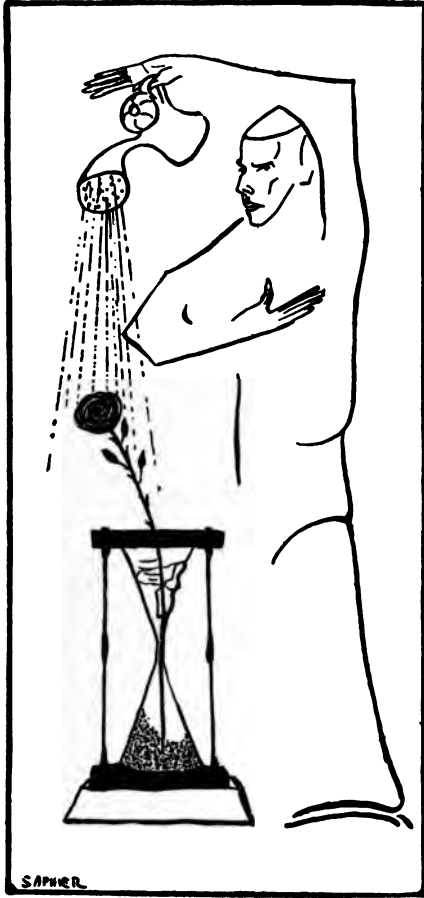
*Conrad Aiken*

(Creeping mysteriously out of the twilight,  
draped in a complex.)

### THE CHARNEL BIRD

Forslin murmurs a melodious impropriety  
Musing on birds and women dead æons  
ago. . . .  
Was he not, once, this fowl, a gay bird in society?  
Can any one tell? . . . After an evening out,  
who can know?  
Perhaps Cleopatra, lush in her inadequate wrap-  
pings,  
Lifted him once to her tatbebs. . . . Perhaps  
Helen of Troy  
Found him more live than her Paris . . . a bird  
among dead ones. . . .  
Perhaps Semiramis . . . once . . . in a pink  
unnamable joy \* \* \*

I tie my shoes politely, a salute to this bird in  
his pear-tree;  
. . . What is a pear-tree, after all. . . . What  
is a bird?  
What is a shoe, or a Forslin, or even a Senlin?





1

What is . . . a what? . . . Is there any one  
who has heard? . . .  
What is it crawls from the kiss-thickened, Freud-  
ian darkness,  
Amorous, catlike . . . Ah, can it be a cat?  
I would so much rather it had been a scarlet  
harlot,  
There is so much more genuine poetry in  
that. . . .

(Note by the Collator: It was, in fact, Fluffums, the Angora cat belonging to the Jenkinses on the corner; and the disappointment was too much for Mr. Aiken, who fainted away, and had to be taken back to Boston before completing his poem, which he had intended to fill an entire book.)

*Mary Carolyn Davies*

(Impetuously, with a floppy hat.)

A YOUNG GIRL TO A YOUNG BIRD

When one is young, you know, then one can sing

Of anything:

One is so young—so pleurably so—

How can one know

If God made little apples, or yet pears,

Or . . . if God cares?

You are young, maybe, Grackle; that is why

I want to cry

Seeing you watch the poems that I say

To-night, to-day . . .

This little boy-bird seems to nod to me

With sympathy:

He is so young: it must be that is why . . .

*As young as I!*

*Marguerite Wilkinson*

(Advancing with sedate courtesy in a long-sleeved, high-necked lecture costume.)

## THE RUNE OF THE NUDE

I will set my slim strong soul on this tree with  
no leaves upon it,

I will lift up my undressed dreams to the nude  
and ethical sky:

This bird has his feathers upon him: he shall  
not have even a sonnet:

Until he is stripped of his last pin-plume I will  
sing of my mate and I!

My ancestors rise from their graves to be shocked  
at my soul's wild climbing

(They were strong, they were righteous, my  
ancestors, but they always kept on their  
clothes)

My mate is the best of all mates alive: his voice  
is a raptured rhyming:

He chants "Come Down!" but it cannot come,  
either for him or those!



**My ancestors pound from their ouija-board: my  
mate leaps in swift indignation:  
I must tell the world of their wonders, but I  
must be strong and free—  
Though all sires and all mates cry out in a runic  
incantation,  
My soul shall be stripped and buttonless—  
it shall dwell in a naked tree!**



*Aline Këlmer*

(With a certain aloofness.)

### ADMIRATION

Kenton's arrogant eyes watch the Widdemer pear-  
tree,

His thistle-down-footed sister puts out her tongue  
at him. . . .

Kenton, what do you see? That yonder is only  
a bare tree;

Come, carry Deborah home; she is gossamer-  
light and slim.

"Aw, mother, but I don't want to!" Kenton re-  
plies with devotion,

"I've gathered you stones for the bird; come on,  
don't you want to throw 'em?"

Ah, Kenton, Kenton, my child, who but you  
would have such an emotion?

But in spite of it I admire you, as you'll see  
when you read this poem.

*The Benet Brothers*

(They sing arm in arm, Stephen Vincent having rather more to do with the verse and William Rose with the chorus. Their sister Laura is too busy looking for a fairy under the tree to add to the family contribution.)

THE GRACKLE OF GROG

It was old Yale College  
Made me what I am—  
You oughto heard my mother  
When I first said damn!  
I put a pin in sister's chair,  
She jumped sky-high . . .  
I don't know what'll happen  
When I come to die!

*But oh, the stars burst wild in a glorious crimson  
whangle,  
There was foam on the beer mile-deep, mile-high,  
and the pickles were piled like seas,  
Næara's hair was a flapper's bob that turned to  
a ten-mile tangle,  
And the forests were crowded with unicorns, and  
gold elephants charged up trees!*







Forceps in the dentist's chair,  
Razors in the lather . . .  
Lord, the black experience  
I've had time to gather . . .  
But I've thought of one thing  
That may pull me through—  
I'm a reg'lar devil  
But the Devil was, too!

*There were thousands of trees with knotholed  
knees that kicked in a league-long rapture,  
Birds green as a seasick emerald in a million-  
mile shrieking row—  
It was sixty dollars or sixty days when the cop  
had made his capture. . . .  
But God! the bun was a gorgeous one, and  
the Faculty did not know!*

*Lola Ridge*

(Who apparently did not care for the suburbs.)

## PREENINGS

I preen myself. . . .

I . . .

Always do . . .

My ego expanding encompasses . . .

Everything, naturally. . . .

This bird preens himself . . .

It is our only likeness. . . .

Ah, God, I want a Ghetto

And a Freud and an alley and some Immigrants  
calling names . . .

God, you know

How awful it is. . . .

Here are trees and birds and clouds

And picturesquely neat children across the way  
on the grass

Not doing anything

Improper . . .

(Poor little fools, I mustn't blame them for that

Perhaps they never

Knew How. . . .)





**But oh, God, take me to the nearest trolley line!  
This is a country landscape—  
I can't stand it!**

**God, take me away—  
There is no Sex here  
And no Smell!**

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

(Recites in a flippant voice which occasionally chokes up with irrepressible emotion, and clenching her hands tensely as she notices that the Grackle has hopped twice.)

TEA O' HERBS

O I have brought in now  
Bergamot,  
A packet o' brown senna  
And an iron pot;  
In my scarlet gown  
I make all hot.

And other men and girls  
Write like me  
Setting herbs a-plenty  
In their poetry  
(*Bergamot for hair-oil,*  
*Bergamot for tea!*)

And they may do ill now  
Or they may do well,  
(Little should I care now  
What they have to sell—)







But what bergamot and rue are  
None of them can tell.

All above my bitter tea  
I have set a lid  
(As my bitter heart  
By its red gown hid)  
They write of bergamot  
Because I did. . . .

(From its padded hangers  
They've snatched my red gown,  
Men as well as girls  
And gone down town,  
Flaunting my vocabulary,  
Every verb and noun!)

And the grackle moans  
High above the pot,  
He is sick with herbs . . .  
*And am I not,  
Who have brought in  
Bergamot?*

*John V. A. Weaver*

(With a strong note of infant brutality.)

### THE WEAVER BIRD

Gosh, kid! that bird a-cheepin' in the tree  
All green an' cocky—why, it might be me  
Singin' to you. . . . Wisht I was just a bird  
Bringin' you worms—aw, you know, things I've  
heard

'Bout me—an' flowers, maybe . . . Like as not  
Somebody'd get me with an old slingshot  
An' I'd be dead . . . Gee, it'd break you up!  
Nothin' would be the same to you, I bet,  
Knowin' my grave was out there in the wet  
And we two couldn't pet no more . . . Say, kid,  
It makes me weep, same as it always did,  
To think how bad you'd feel. . . .

I got a thought,  
An awful funny one I sorta caught—  
Nobody never thought that way, I guess—  
When I get blue, an' things is in a mess  
I map out all my funeral, the hearses  
An' nineteen carriages, an' folks with verses

Sayin' how great I was, an' all like that,  
An' wreaths, an' girls with crapes around their  
    hat  
Tellin' the world how bad their hearts was broke,  
An' you, just smashed to think I had to  
    croak. . . .

I can't stand that bird, somehow—makes me  
    cry. . . .  
*The world'll be darn sorry when I die!*

*David Morton*

(Who, being very polite, only thought it.)

**SONNET: TREES ARE NOT SHIPS**

There is no magic in a living tree,  
And, if they be not sea-gulls, none in birds:  
My soul is seasick, and its only words  
Murmur desire for things more like a sea.  
In this dry landscape here there seems to be  
No water, merely persons in large herds,  
Who, by their long remarks, their arid girds,  
Come from the Poetry Society.

What could be drier, where all things are dry?  
What boots this bird, this pear-tree spreading  
wide?  
Oh, make this bird they all discuss to pie,  
Hew down this tree and shape its planks to ships,  
Send them to sea with these folk nailed inside,  
That I may have great sonnets on my lips!

*Elinor Wylie*

(With an air of admitting the tragic and all-  
important fact.)

THE GRACKLE IS THE LOON

Never believe this bird connotes  
Jade whorls of carven commonness:  
Nor as from ordinary throats  
Slides his sharp song in ice-strung stress.

He is the cold and scornful Loon,  
Who, hoping that the sun shall fail,  
Steeps in the silver of the moon  
His burnished claws, his chiseled tail.

*Leonora Speyer*

(Speaking, notwithstanding, with unshaken  
poise.)

A LANDSCAPE GETS PERSONAL

Beloved. . . .  
I cannot bear that Bird .

He is green  
With envy of My Songs:  
*"Cheep! Cheep!"*

This Tree  
Has a furtive look  
And the Brook  
Says, "Oh . . . Splash. . . ."

And the Grass . . . the terrible Grass . . .  
It waves at me. . . .  
It is too flirtatious!

Beloved,  
Let us leave swiftly . . .

*I fear this Landscape!*  
*It would vamp me!*



SAPHIRE





*Corinne Roosevelt Robinson*

(Who, having engagements to speak at ten unveilings, and nine public schools and twelve other symposiums, stayed away, but sent this handsome tribute by wire.)

### THE SYMPOSIUM LEADING NOWHERE

I sing of the joy of the Small Paths  
The paths that lead nowhere at all,  
(Though I never have gone on them nevertheless  
They are admirable, and so small!)

I go out at midnight in motors  
But, being a Roosevelt, I drive  
Straight ahead on the neatly paved highway,  
For I wish with much speed to arrive.

Oh, the joy and effulgence of Small Paths  
Surrounded with Birds and with Trees  
I would love to go down on a Small Path  
And sit in communion with these!  
Oh, Grackle, I yearn to be with you,  
For poetic communion I yearn  
But I have ten engagements to speak in the  
suburbs  
And alas, I've no time to return.

*Oh alas, the undone moments,  
Oh, the myriad hours bereft  
Trying to be twenty people  
And to do things right and left.  
I would sit down by a Small Path  
And would make me a Large Rhyme  
I should love to find my soul there  
But I haven't got the time!*

*Ridgely Torrence*

(Who felt that the Bird did not sufficiently  
uphold Art.)

### THE FOWL OF A THOUSAND FLIGHTS

Grackle, Grackle on your tree,  
There's something wrong to-day,  
In the moonlight, in the quiet evening,  
You will rise and croak and fly away;  
Oh, you have sat and listened till you're wild for  
flight

(And that's all right)

But you have never criticised a single song

(And that's all wrong)

Lo, would you add despair unto despair?

Do you not care

That all these lesser children of the Muse

Shall sing to you exactly as they choose?

You are ungrateful, Fowl. I wrote a poem,  
Once, in the middle of August, intending to show  
'em

That you should not

Be shot:

What saw I then, what heard?

Multitudes—multitudes, under the tree they  
stirred,  
And with too many a broken note and wheeze  
They sang what each did please. . . .

And Thou,  
O bird of emeraldine beak and brow,  
Thou sawest it all, and did not even cackle,  
Grackle!

*Henry van Dyke*

(Who, although for different reasons, did not  
care for the Grackle either.)

THE ROILING OF HENRY

(A SONG OF THE GRATING OUTDOORS)

Bird, thou art not a Veery,  
Nor yet a Yellowthroat,  
Ne'erless, I knew thy gentle song,  
Long, long e'er I could vote;  
Thou art not a Blue Flower,  
Nor e'en a real Blue Bird;  
Yet there's a moral high and pure  
In all thy liltings heard:  
*"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—  
Go on and ne'er look back!"*

The noble tow'rs of Princeton  
Hear high thy pensive trill,  
And eke my ear has heard thee  
The while I fished the rill;  
Thy note rings out at daybreak  
Before I rise to toil;  
Thou counselest Persistence;  
Thy song no stone can spoil;  
*"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—  
Go on and ne'er look back!"*

Yet, Bird, there is a limit  
To all I've undergone;  
From five o'clock till five o'clock  
Thou'st chanted o'er my lawn;  
I cannot get my work done . . .  
I give thee, Bird, advice;  
If thou wouldst save thy skin alive,  
Let me not warn thee twice,  
*"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—  
Go on and ne'er look back!"*

*Cale Young Rice*

(Who came out rather tired from trying to  
choose a new suit, and could not get it off  
his mind.)

## PANTINGS

Pantings, Pantings, Pantings!  
Gents' immanent furnishings!  
On a mystic tide I ride, I ride,  
Of the clothes of a million springs!  
I take the train for the suburbs  
Or I sweep from Pole to Pole,  
But where is the window that holds them not,  
Gents' furnishings of my soul!

Pantings, Pantings, Pantings!  
Shirtings and coatings too!  
How can I think of mere birds, nor blink  
In the Cosmic Hullabaloo?  
The hot world throbs with Immenseness,  
The Voidness plunks in the Void,  
And all of it doubtless has something to do  
With Employer and Unemployed!



**Pantings! Pantings! Pantings!**  
Trousers through all the town!  
And the tailors' dummies with iron for tummies  
Smirk in their blue and brown;  
I float in a slithering simoon  
Of fevered and surging tints,  
And my ears are dulled with the mighty throb  
Of the Male Best Dressers' Hints:

*Pantings! Pantings! Pantings!*  
*My wardrobe, they send it fleet. . . .*  
*Ah, the Is and the Was and the Never Does. . . .*  
*And the Cosmos at last complete!*

*Bliss Carman*

(Who, incidentally, happened to be correct.)

## THE WILD

Ho, Spring calls clear a message. . . .  
The Grackle is not green. . . .  
The Mighty Mother Nature  
She knows just what I mean.

The lilac and the willow  
The grass and violet  
They are my wild companions  
Where I was raised a pet.

The secrets of great nature  
From childhood I have heard;  
Oh, I can tell a wild flower  
Swiftly from a wild bird;

And Gwendolen and Marna  
And Myrtle (dead all three . . . .  
Among my wildwood sweethearts  
Was much mortality).

If they my loves returning  
Might gather 'neath these boughs  
(Oh, they would sniff at pear-trees  
Who loved the Northern Sloughs).

Their wild eternal whisper  
Would back me up, I ween:  
"This bird is not a Grackle:  
A Grackle is not green."

*Grace Hazard and Hilda Conkling*

THEY SEE THE BIRDIE

(Mrs. Conkling points maternally.)

Oh, Hilda! see the little Bird!  
If you will watch, upon my word  
He will come out; a Veery \* he  
As like an Oboe as can be:  
He shall be wingèd, with a tail,  
Mayhap a Beak him shall not fail!  
And I will tell him, "Birdie, oh,  
This is my Hilda, you must know—  
And oh, what joy, if you but knew—  
She shall make poetry on you!"

(The Birdie obliges, whereupon Hilda recites obediently, while her mother, concealing herself completely behind the bird, takes dictation.)

Oh, my lovely Mother,  
That is a Bird:  
Sitting on a Tree.  
I am a Little Girl

\* Note by the Collator: I do not pretend to explain the veery-complex of American poets. They all seemed possessed to rub it into the poor bird that he wasn't one.

**Standing on the Ground.**

**I see the Bird,**

**The Bird sees me.**

***Bird!***

***Color of Grass!***

***I love my Mother***

***More than I do You!***

*Theodosia Garrison*

(Who began cheerfully, but reduced her audience to tears, which she surveyed with complacency, by the third line.)

A BALLAD OF THE BIRD DANCE OF  
PIERRETTE

*Pierrette's mother speaks:*

“Sure is it Pierrette yez are, Pierrette and no  
other?

(Och, Pierrette, me heart is broke that ye shud  
be that same—)

Pertendin’ to be Frinch, an’ me yer poor ould  
Irish mother

That named ye Bridget fer yer aunt, a dacent  
Dublin name!

Ye that was a pious girrl, decked out in ruffled  
collars,

With yer hair that docked an’ frizzed—if Fa-  
ther Pat shud see!

Dancin’ on a piece o’ grass all puddle-holes an’  
hollers,

Amusin’ these quare folk that’s called a Pote-  
Society!”

*But it was Bridget Sullivan,  
Her locks flour-sprent,  
That danced beneath the flowering tree  
Leaping as she went.*

“If there’s folk to stare at ye ye’ll dance for all  
creation  
(Since ye went to settlements ’tis little else I’ve  
heard),  
Letting yer good wages go to chat of ‘inspiration,’  
Flappin’ up an’ down an’ makin’ out yez are a  
burrd!  
Sure if ye got cash fer it ’tis little I’d be sayin’  
(Och, Pierrette, stenographin’ ’tis better wage  
ye’ll get,)  
Sorra wan these long-haired folk has spoke till ye  
o’ payin’,  
Talkin’ of yer art, an’ ye a leppin’ in the wet!”

*But it was Bridget Sullivan,  
Her head down-bent,  
Went back on the three-thirteen,  
Coughing as she went.*

*William Griffith*

(Who felt for her.)

**PIERRETTE REMEMBERS AN ENGAGE-  
MENT**

Pierrette has gone—but it was not  
Exactly that she lied;  
She said she had to catch a train;  
“I have a date,” she cried.

To keep a sudden rendezvous  
It came into her mind  
As quite the quickest way to flee  
From parties of this kind;

She went most softly and most soon,  
But still she made a stir,  
For, going, she took all the men  
To town along with her.



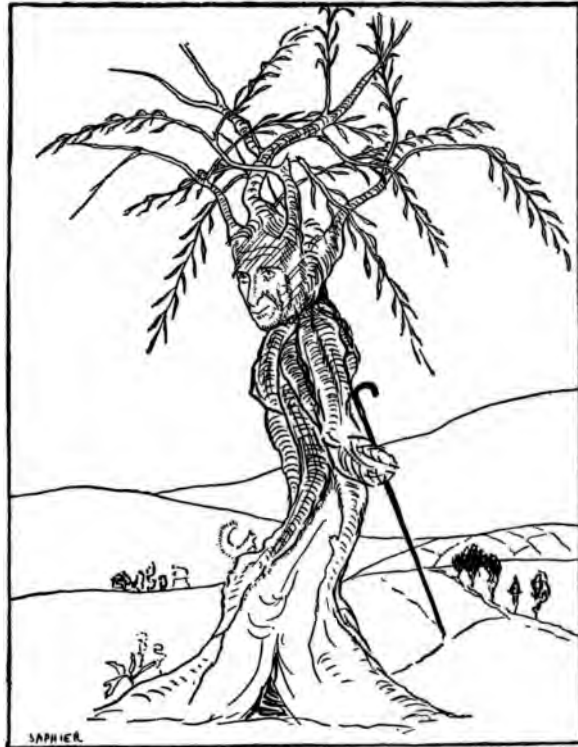
*Edgar Guest*

(Who has an air of absolute belief in the True,  
the Optimistic, and the Checkbook. He  
seems yet a little ill at ease among the  
others, and to be looking about restlessly  
for Ella Wheeler Wilcox.)

**AIN'T NATURE WONDERFUL!**

How dear to me are home and wife,  
The dear old Tree I used to Love,  
The Pear it shed on starting life  
And God's Outdoors so bright above!

For Virtue gets a high reward,  
Noble is all good Scenery,  
So I will root for Virtue hard,  
For God, for Nature, and for Me!





*Don Marquis*

(Who, it appears, refers to departments which he and certain of his friends run in New York papers. He swings a theoretical barrel of hootch above his head, and chants:)

### THE MEETING OF THE COLUMNS

Chris and Frank and I  
Each had a column;  
Chris and I were plump and gay,  
But not so F.P.A.:  
F.P.A. was solemn—  
Not so his Column;  
That was full of wit,  
As good as My Column  
Nearly every bit!  
We sat on each an office chair  
And all snapped our scissors;  
Their things were pretty fair  
But all of mine were Whizzers!

Frank wrote of Cyril,  
An ungrammatic sinner,  
But I wrote of Drink  
And Chris wrote of Dinner;  
And Frank kept getting thinner

And we kept getting plump—  
Frank sat like a Bump  
    Translating from the Latin,  
Chris wrote of Happy Homes  
I wrote of Alcoholic Foams,  
    And we still seemed to fatten;  
Frank wrote of Swell Parties where he had been,  
I wrote of Whisky-sours, and Chris wrote of Gin!  
But we both got fatter,  
So the parties didn't matter,  
Though F.P.A. he published each as soon as he'd  
    been at her. . . .

F.P.A. went calling  
    And sang about it sorely . . .  
*"Pass around the shandygaff," says brave old  
    Morley!*  
F.P.A. played tennis  
    And told the World he did. . . .  
*I bought a stein of beer and tipped up the lid!*  
Frank wrote up all his evenings out till we began  
    to cry,  
*But we drowned our envy in a long cool Rye!*

And then we got an invitation, Frank and Chris  
    and me,  
To come and say a poem on a Grackle in a Tree:





But Chris and I'd had twenty ryes, and we began  
to cackle—

“Oh, see the ninety pretty birds, and every one  
a Grackle!

A Grackle with a Hackle,

A ticklish one to tackle

A tacklish one to tickle . . .

To ticker . . .

To licker. . . .”

And we both began to giggle

And woggle, and wiggle,

And we giggled and we gurgled

And we gargled and were gay . . .

*For we'd had an invitation, just the same as*

*F.P.A.!*



*Christopher Morley*

(Acting, in spite of himself, as if the Bird  
were his long-lost brother, and locating the  
Grackle, for poetic purposes, in his own  
home.)

### THE MOCKING-HOARSE BIRD

Good fowl, though I would speak to thee  
With wonted geniality,  
And Oxford charm in my address,  
It's not quite easy, I confess:  
*Suaviter in modo's* hard  
When poets trample one's front yard,  
And this is such an enormous crew  
That you've got trailing after you!  
I'd washed my youngest child but four,  
Put the milk-bottles out the door,  
Paid my wife's hat-bill with no sigh  
(Ah, happy wife! Ah, happy I!)  
Tossed down (see essays) then my pen  
To be a private citizen,  
Written about that in the Post,  
When lo, upon the lawn a host  
Of Poets, sprung upon my sight  
Each eager for a Poem to write!

To a less placid bard you'd be  
A flat domestic tragedy,—  
Bird—grackle—nay, I'd scarcely call  
You bird—a mere egg you, that's all—  
Only a bad egg has the nerve  
To poach (a pun!) on my preserve!  
To P.Q.S. and X.Y.D.  
(Both columnists whom you should see)  
And L.M.N. (a man who never  
Columns a word that isn't clever,)  
And B.C.D (who scintillates  
Much more than most who get his rates)  
A thing like this would be a trial. . . .  
It is to me, there's no denial.

Why, Bird, if they would sing of you,  
Or Sin, or Broken Hearts, or Rue,  
Or what Young Devils they all are,  
Or Scarlet Dames, or the First Star,  
Or South-Sea-Jazz-Hounds sorrowing,  
It would be quite another thing:  
But, Bird, here they come mousing round  
On my suburban, sacred ground,  
And see my happiness—it's flat,  
You wretched Bird, they'll sing of that!  
They'll hymn my Happy Hearth, and later  
The joys of my Refrigerator,

Burst into song about the points  
Of Babies, Married Peace, Hot Joints,  
The Jimmy-Pipe I often carol,  
My Commutation, my Rain-Barrel,  
And each Uncontroverted Fact  
With which my poetry is packed . . .  
In short, base Bird, they'll sing like me,  
*And then, where will my living be?*

*Franklin P. Adams*

(Coldly ignoring the roistering of his friends,  
addresses the Grackle with bitterness:)

TO A GRACKLE

(Horace, Ode XVIXXV, p. 23)

Bird, if you think I do not care  
To gaze upon your feathered form  
Rather than converse with some fair  
Or make my brow with tennis warm;

If you should think I'd liefer far  
Hear your sweet song than fast be  
driving  
Within my costly motor car  
And in my handsome home arriving,

If you should think I would be gone  
Far sooner than you might expect  
From off this uncolumnar lawn;  
Bird, you'd be utterly correct!

*Tom Daly*

(Showing the Italian's love of the Beautiful,  
which he makes his own more than the  
Anglo-Saxon dreams of doing.)

CARLO THE GARDENER

De poets dey tinka dey gotta da tree,  
Dey gotta da arta, da birda—but me,  
I lova da arta, I lova da flower,  
(Ah, *bella foretta!*) I waita da hour:  
I mowa da grass, I rake uppa da leaf—  
I brava young Carlo—Maria! fine t'ief!  
I waita  
Till later.

Da poets go homa, go finda da sup',  
I creep by dis tree and I digga her up,  
(Da Grackla, da blossom, da tree-a I love,  
*Per Dio!* and da art!) So I giva da shove,  
I catcha da birda, I getta da tree,  
I taka to Rosa my wife, and den she—  
She gotta  
In potta!

*Vachel Lindsay*

(Bounding on toward the end of the proceedings with a bundle over his shoulder, and making the rest join in at the high spots.)

## THE HOBOKEN GRACKLE AND THE HOBO

(AN EXPLANATION)

As I went marching, torn-socked, free, [Steadily]  
With my red heart marching all agog in front  
of me

And my throbbing heels  
And my throbbing feet  
Making an impression on the Ho- [With energy]  
boken street

Then I saw a pear-tree, a fowl, a bird,  
And the worst sort of noise an [With surprise]  
Illinoisier ever heard!

Banks—of—poets—round—that—tree—  
*All of the Poetry Society but me!*

All a-cackle, addressed it as a [Chatteringly  
grackle like parrots]

Showed me its hackle (that proved it was a fly)

Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, [*Cooingly, yet  
with impa-  
tience!*]  
Gosh, what a packed street!

The Secretary, *President* and TREASURER  
went by!

“That’s not a grackle,” said I to all of him,  
Seething with their poetry, iron-tongued, grim,  
“*That’s an English sparrow on that limb!*”

And they all went home

No more to roam.

And I watched their unmade poetry  
raise up like foam [*Intemperately*]

And I took my bandanna again on  
my stick [*With calm  
majesty*]

And I walked to the grocery and took my pick

And I bought crackers, canned [*With domes-  
ticity for the  
moment*]  
shrimps, corn,

Codfish like flakes of snow at morn,

Buns for breakfast and a fountain-pen

Laid down change and marched out again

And I walked through Hoboken, torn-socked, free,

*With my red heart galumphing all agog in front  
of me!*







## DIES ILLA: A BIRD OF A MASQUE

Being a Collaboration by Percy Mackaye,  
Isabel Fiske Conant and Josephine  
Preston Peabody.

### DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE GRACKLE (who does not appear at all)  
THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP  
THE SPIRIT OF MODERN POETRY  
CHORUS OF ELDERLY LADIES WHO APPRECIATE POETRY  
CHORUS OF CORRESPONDENCE, KINDERGARTEN, GRAMMAR,  
HIGH-SCHOOL AND COLLEGE CLASSES IN VERSE-  
WRITING  
CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN RUNNING POETRY MAGAZINES  
CHORUS OF POETRY CRITICS  
CHORUS OF ASSORTED CULTURE-HOUNDS  
THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POETIC RENAISSANCE  
IN AMERICA  
THE NON-POETRY WRITING PUBLIC (Composed of two citi-  
zens who have never learned to read or write)  
SEMI-CHORUSES OF MAGAZINE EDITORS AND BOOK-PUB-  
LISHERS  
ATÉ, GODDESS OF DISCORD  
THE MUSE  
TIME: *Next year.* PLACE: *Everywhere.* SCENE: *A level  
stretch of monotony.*

THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP (*Entering  
despairingly*)

Alas—in vain! Yet I have barred the way  
As best I might, that this great horror fall  
Not on the world. *Returned with many thanks  
And not because of lack of merit, I*

Have said to twenty million poets . . . nay . . .  
Profane it not, that word . . . to twenty million  
Persons who wasted stamps and typewriting  
And midnight oil, to add unto the world  
More Bunk. . . . In vain—in vain!  
*(She sinks down sobbing.)*

*(From right and left of stage enter Semi-  
Choruses of Magazine Editors and Book  
Publishers, tearing their hair rhythmic-  
ally.)*

**SEMI-CHORUS OF EDITORS**

We have mailed their poems back  
To every man and woman-jack  
Who weigh the postman down  
From country and from town;  
But all in vain, in vain,  
They mail them in again!

**SEMI-CHORUS OF PUBLISHERS**

Though we've sent them flying,  
We are nearly dying,  
From the books of poetry  
Sent by people unto we;  
In vain we keep them off our shelves,  
They go and publish them themselves!

SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIPS

All, bravely have ye toiled, my masters, aye,  
And I've toiled with you . . . All in vain, in  
vain—

*(Enter, with a proud consciousness of duty  
well done, the Chorus of Correspondence,  
Kindergarten, Grammar, High-School and  
College Classes for Writing Verse. They  
sing Joyously)*

The Day has come that we adore,  
The Day we've all been working for,  
Now babies in their bassinets  
And military school cadets,  
And chambermaids in each hotel  
And folks in slums who cannot spell,  
Professors, butchers, clergymen,  
And every one, have grabbed a pen:  
The Day has come—tra la, tra lee—  
*Everybody* writes poetry!

*(They do a Symbolic Dance with Type-  
writers, during which enters the Chorus of  
Young Men who Run Poetry Magazines.  
These put on horn-rimmed spectacles and  
chant earnestly as follows)*

CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN WHO RUN POETRY MAGAZINES

We're very careful what we put in;  
This magazine is of highest grade;  
If it doesn't appeal to our personal taste  
There's no use sending it, we're afraid;  
We don't like Shelley, we don't like Keats,  
We don't like poets who're tactlessly dead;  
If you write like us there will be no fuss—  
That's the best of verse, when the last word's  
said. . . . (*Bursting irrepressibly into  
youthful enthusiasm, and dashing their  
horn spectacles to the ground*)

Yale! Yale! Yale!  
Our Poetry!  
Fine Poetry!  
Nobody Else's Poetry!  
Raw! Raw! Raw! Raw!

*(Enter, modestly, the Person Responsible for  
the Poetic Renaissance in America. There  
are four of him—or her, as the case may  
be—Miss Monroe, Miss Rittenhouse, Mrs.  
Stork, Mr. Braithwaite. The Person  
stands in a row and recites in unison:)*

I've made Poetry  
What it is today;  
Or . . . at least . . .  
That's what people say:  
Earnest-minded effort  
Never can be hid;  
The Others think They did it—  
But—I—Did!

SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP, EDITORS AND  
PUBLISHERS, (*faintly:*)

You *did*? (*They rush out.*)  
Person Responsible (*still modestly*)  
Well, so they say—  
But I have to go away.  
I'm due at a lecture  
I give at three today. (*The Person goes out  
in single file, looking at its watch. As  
it does so, there enters a pale and di-  
shevelled girl in Greek robes. It is the  
Muse.*)

MUSE:

In Mount Olympus we have heard a noise and  
crying  
As swine that in deep agony are dying,  
A voice of tom-cats wailing,  
A never failing

Thud as of rolling logs:  
A chattering like frogs,  
And all this noise, unceasing, thunderous,  
Making a horrible fuss,  
Cries out upon my name.  
Oh, what am I, the Muse and giver of Fame,  
So to be mocked and humbled by this use?  
I—I, the Muse!

*(Enter Spirit of Modern Poetry, a lady with  
bobbed hair, clad lightly in horn glasses  
and a sex-complex.)*

**SPIRIT OF MODERN POETRY**

You're behind the times; quite narrow,  
Don't you want  
Culture for the masses?

**MUSE**

No; I am Greek; we never did.  
Besides, it *isn't* culture.

**CHORUS OF ELDERLY LADIES WHO APPRECIATE**

*POETRY, (trotting by two by two on their  
way to a lecture, pause.)*

Oh, how narrow! Oh, how shocking!  
She's no Muse! She must be mocking!

MUSE (*sternly, having lost her temper by this time*)

I am a goddess. Trifle not with me.

ELDERLY LADIES (*with resolute tolerance*)

She *looks* like a pupil of Isadora Duncan,  
But she says she's a goddess; what folly we'd  
be sunk in  
To believe a word she says; she needs broad'-  
ning, we conjecture —  
My dear, come with us to Miss Rittenhouse's  
lecture!

MUSE (*lifting her arms angrily*)

Até, my sister!

ATE, (*behind the scenes*) I come!

(*Enter from one side, Band of Poets—very large—with lyres and wreaths put on over their regular clothes. From the other side, a chorus of Poetry Critics. At their end steals Até, Goddess of Discord, disguised as a Critic by means of horn glasses and a Cane. The Poets do not see her—or anything but themselves, indeed. They sing obliviously*)



My maiden aunt in Keokuk  
She writes free verse like anything;  
My great-grandmother is in luck,  
She's sold her three-piece work on Spring;  
My mother does Poetic Plays,  
My dad does rhymes while signing checks,  
And my flapper sister—we wouldn't have  
missed her—  
She's writing an epic on Sin and Sex—  
The world's as perfect as it can be,  
Everybody writes Poetry!

CHORUS OF CRITICS, (*chanting yet more loudly:*)  
The world's not *quite* as perfect as it *yet* might  
be,  
Excepting for our brother-critics' poetry!

*The Spirit of Discord now creeps softly out from  
among the Critics.)*

SPIRIT OF DISCORD

Rash poets, think what you would do—  
There's nobody left you can read it to!

POETS (*aghast*)

We never thought of that!  
An audience, 'tis flat,

Is our most pressing need,  
To listen to our screed;  
*(Each turns to his neighbor)*  
Base scribbler, get thee hence  
Or be my audience!

Semi-chorus:

We want to write ourselves! We'll not!

Semi-chorus:

But what *you* write is merely rot!  
Hush up and let *me* read  
My great, eternal screed!

ATÉ *(stealthily)* Ha, ha!

*(Each Poet now draws a Fountain Pen with a bayonet attached, and kills the Poet next him, dying himself immediately from the wound of the Poet on the other side. They fall in neat windrows. There are no Poets left. Meanwhile the Non-Poetry-Writing Public, two in number, who have been shooting crap in a corner, rise up at the sound of the fall, take three paces to the front, and speak:)*

What's the use o' poetry, anyhow? I always say, 'if you wanta say anything you can say it a lot easier in prose.' I never wrote no poetry, and I get along fine in the hardware business.

CHORUS OF CRITICS AND CULTURE-HOUNDS,  
*(thrilled:)*

Ah, a new Gospel!  
Let us write Reviews  
About it!

THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP (*entering,  
and addressing the Editors and Publishers  
who follow her.*)

Now I shall pass from you. My task comes  
to a close.  
I wing my hallowed way  
To the Fool-Killer's Paradise, and there for aye  
Repose.

EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS

Nay, our great helper, nay!  
Leave us not yet, our only comforter!  
We'll need thee still;  
Folks who write poetry  
There's naught on earth can kill!

*(During this the CULTURE-HOUNDS, CRITICS,  
etc., have clustered round the NON-POETRY-  
WRITING PUBLIC, whispering, urging, and  
pushing. It rises and scratches its head  
in a flattered way, and finally says:)*

B'gosh, I do believe,  
Now that you speak of it, I could do just as  
good  
As any of those there fool dead fellers could!

*(The late Non-Poetry-Writing Public are  
both immediately invested with lyres, and  
wreaths which they put on over their  
derby hats.)*

SEMI-CHORUS OF EDITORS *(to Spirit of Rejection  
Slip)*

You see? Too late!

SEMI-CHORUS OF PUBLISHERS

Who shall escape o'ermastering tragic fate?

*(They go off and sob in two rows in the  
corners, while the rest of the Masque,  
except ATÈ, who looks at them as if she  
weren't through yet, and the MUSE, form  
up to do a dance symbolic of One Being  
Born Every Minute. They sing:)*

The Day has come that we adore,  
The Day we've all been working for;  
The Day has come, tra la, tra lee!  
*Everybody* writes Poetry!

THE MUSE (*unnoticed in the background*)  
Farewell.

